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SUBJECT: UNDERSECRETARY DOBRIANSKY VISIT TO CROATIA

REF: ZAGREB 333

Classified By: PolOff Mitch Benedict for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

Summary

1. (C) On March 2 Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky visited Croatia and met with President Stjepan Mesic, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, and Foreign Minister Miomir Zuzul. The Under Secretary discussed Croatia's participation in the Community of Democracies, the UN Commission on Human Rights, and how Croatia might become more engaged in Afghanistan, as well as refugee return and reintegration, progress on combating trafficking in persons, and cooperation with the ICTY in a full day of meetings in Zagreb. Sanader and Zuzul pressed at every opportunity for U.S. support for Croatia's entry into NATO and the EU. End Summary.

Interlocutors

2. (U) On March 2, Under Secretary of State for Global Affairs Paula Dobriansky visited Croatia for one day of meetings with senior government officials. She began the day with a working lunch at the Office of the Prime Minister; participants included Ambassador Ralph Frank, Prime Minister Ivo Sanader, Foreign Minister Miomir Zuzul, and other high level state officials. U/S Dobriansky next visited the Foreign Ministry, where she again met with Foreign Minister Zuzul and his staff. Zuzul introduced the new government's line up of MFA officials working on bilateral and multilateral issues of concern to the U.S. Late in the day President Stjepan Mesic hosted U/S Dobriansky for a meeting at his Office; Foreign Minister Zuzul and the president's senior foreign policy advisors joined in the meeting.

Croatia's EU and Nato Aspirations

3. (C) Sanader and Zuzul returned at every available opportunity to their priority theme -- Croatia seeks visible support from Washington for entry into the EU and NATO at the earliest opportunity. The recent visit to Croatia by SecDef Rumsfeld was cast as a major step forward in bilateral relations.

4. (C) Sanader and Zuzul both stressed that they are pursuing return and reintegration and cooperation with ICTY not only because Croatia is obligated to do so, but because they are the right things to do. They also acknowledged that such a path is necessary for entry into the EU and NATO. They claimed that Croatia is the most advanced country in the region, and that it could be the success story, the example for others to follow.

5. (C) However, in order for the GOC to do the right things on issues of concern to the international community -- issues on which the public holds "mixed feelings" or significantly opposes -- the GOC needs to receive clear signals of support or acceptance by the United States and the international community.

6. (C) Specifically, what they would like out of the next NATO summit is communique language in which each aspirant country is mentioned by name, its successes are recognized, and its future path of entry is defined. U/S Dobriansky noted their arguments and said she would convey the Government's message to Washington.

Refugee Return and Reintegration

7. (C) PM Ivo Sanader opened his meeting with U/S Dobriansky by stressing actions he has taken to encourage ethnic Serb refugees to return to Croatia. He noted that five days prior to the November elections he had called publicly for the return of refugees, signaling to supporters of his center-right Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) party the direction he intended to lead the country should the HDZ come to power.

18. (C) Following the elections, in his quest to form a government, Sanader gained the support of all eight MPs representing minorities in parliament. In a further unprecedented move for a Prime Minister of Croatia, Sanader celebrated Christmas with the Serbian Orthodox community -- an action he described as a big shock for Croatian society. He frankly acknowledged the "old" HDZ's poor record on

minority issues and said there is no alternative now to "normal relations." The new government is only 70 days old, but Sanader was pleased to report on his efforts to promote return and reintegration.

19. (C) President Mesic, who offered no timetable except to say that the process had begun, affirmed that the government would reconstruct all homes destroyed during the war. He said it was in Croatia's interest for all citizens to return if democracy were to take root and thrive. He was positive about the general human rights situation in Croatia, minority protections, and the strides Croatia has made with regard to development of a free press. On the other hand, he affirmed that judicial reform had yet to begin and was sorely needed for Croatia to consolidate its democratic transition.

110. (C) U/S Dobriansky stressed in her meetings the importance of working specifically on the process of reintegration. She said that other countries have experiences with reintegration that can be drawn on, and that the U.S. will work with the GOC and perhaps make available outside expertise on reintegration. The offer was made of a potential joint visit to Croatia of PRM A/S Dewey and UNHCR Head Rudd Lubbers to meet with their Croatian counterparts on reintegration to discuss best practices and how the government might improve its chances for success in this crucial area.

Community of Democracies

11. (C) The Under Secretary highlighted the good work being done within the framework of the Community of Democracies (CD). She said the CD is an important affiliation and encouraged Croatia to play a greater leadership role in sharing its experiences along the path of transition to democracy.

112. (C) The GOC was receptive to greater involvement with the CD. PM Sanader remarked "I fully agree with this." FM Zuzul asked for elaboration on specific ways in which the GOC can help. U/S Dobriansky expressed her desire to continue discussions on the issue, and offered to provide more specific suggestions on how Croatia might play a larger role within the CD.

UN Commission on Human Rights (CHR)

113. (C) U/S Dobriansky told PM Sanader the U.S. wants to work with the GOC at the CHR to partner on issues of mutual concern. She informed FM Zuzul that the U.S. delegation will hold a breakfast meeting on March 17 for all democracies in the CHR. She invited Croatia to attend. This meeting would be an opportunity for democracies to discuss their priorities for CHR and coordinate as appropriate. She announced that we are working with several Latin American nations to co-sponsor this year's resolution on Cuba, and she requested that Croatia consider co-sponsoring the resolution.

114. (C) Zuzul commented that the Czech Republic had approached Croatia on this year's Cuba resolution. He promised the GOC would seriously consider the request. However, he cautioned that co-sponsoring would be difficult if there is no other European co-sponsor. He noted that by co-sponsoring the Cuba resolution, Croatian companies doing business in Cuba would likely suffer.

115. (C) The Under Secretary also asked Croatia to support the U.S. position in the CHR on China. She said the U.S. was not seeking co-sponsorship, but merely support. Zuzul offered no reaction on China. Comment: Croatia is opposed to country specific resolutions in principle; moving the GOC away from this position could prove challenging. End Comment.

Participation in Afghanistan

116. (C) In addition to playing a larger role within the CD, U/S Dobriansky stressed that greater participation in Afghanistan offers Croatia a larger stage for sharing its democratic development experiences. She was just in Afghanistan, and she spoke not just of the needs of Afghans, but of the tremendous work being done by the international forces now in the country as Afghanistan strives to recover from decades of war.

117. (C) Zuzul offered to explore areas in which Croatia might

be able to provide additional assistance. The Croatian experience, in war and in the post-conflict period, means

that many people have skills that could be used in Afghanistan. Examples would be in medical teams, counselors for victims of post-traumatic stress syndrome, and demining.

Cooperation with the Hague Tribunal

118. (C) Sanader mentioned Croatia's relationship with the Hague Tribunal. He said his government is committed to nothing less than full and unconditional cooperation with the ICTY in all cases, including that of indictee Ante Gotovina. He added that Andre Hebrang, Minister of Health, and Branimir Glavas, the HDZ party head and county prefect in Eastern Slavonia, members of the party's so-called hardline faction, have both supported HDZ's policy of cooperation with the ICTY; they have both called publicly for Gotovina to turn himself in to The Hague.

119. (C) In his meeting, Sanader also told the Under Secretary that cooperation with The Hague is a far more difficult issue for the government than, for example, refugee return. The average Croatian finds it extremely hard to accept that the people who recovered Croatian territory and brought the country to independence are war criminals. U/S Dobriansky commented that cooperation with the ICTY is important for fulfilling Croatia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and that the international community will be looking not so much at what Croatia says but at what it actually does.

Trafficking in Persons

120. (C) Dobriansky raised trafficking in persons as an issue in her meetings. Sanader demonstrated an awareness of U.S. concerns and said he wanted to work with the U.S. so that Croatia can move from Tier 2 to Tier 1 on the Annual Report to Congress on Trafficking in Persons. In her meetings with Sanader and Zuzul, the Under Secretary suggested that the GOC designate an effective point of contact on the issue of trafficking, someone who could ensure compliance within the government as well as work closely with the international community.

121. (C) Zuzul told the Under Secretary that responsibility for the issue of trafficking was now with the foreign ministry, and that Tomislav Vidosevic, the newly appointed Assistant Minister for Multilateral Affairs, would be our point of contact. (Vidosevic manages the MFA's Department for Human Rights.) Andrea Bekic, acting head of the MFA's Americas Department, cited the November 2003 UNICEF/UNHCHR/OSCE ODIHR report as evidence that Croatia is doing well in the fight against trafficking. She provided us with a copy of the December 2003 Non-Paper on Trafficking in Croatia presented by Croatia's Embassy in Washington to the Department.

122. (C) The Under Secretary noted that some countries, and the EU, have identified the institution of the Ombudsman as an independent, yet government sanctioned point of contact for trafficking issues. An ombudsman, for example, could issue an independent report on governmental actions to combat trafficking in persons. U/S Dobriansky stressed that it is also important for the Embassy of Croatia in Washington to engage actively with the Department on the issue of trafficking in persons. Zuzul said he would instruct Croatia's DCM in Washington to contact G/TIP and engage with the Department as a point of contact on the problem.

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